



Norris Square  
Neighborhood Project

# Annual Report

2023

@myneighborhoodproject  
[myneighborhoodproject.org](http://myneighborhoodproject.org)

# Letter from the Board Chair

Dear Community Partners, Donors, and Neighbors,

As we close out 2023, the Board of Directors for Norris Square Neighborhood Project (NSNP) has reflected on our organization's legacy and shared immense gratitude for our continued growth. In July, we convened over 300 community leaders, neighbors, supporters, youth, alums, former staff, and partner organizations to celebrate NSNP's 50th anniversary! This Festival Jíbaro allowed us to honor the contributions and heritage of Helen Loeb and Natalie Kempner, who founded NSNP in 1973.

2023 also reminded us that the life of an organization experiences beautiful and challenging cycles as we began our process of saying goodbye to our Executive Director, Teresa Elliott, and starting our search for NSNP's next leader. We cannot thank Teresa enough for her loving, visionary, and collaborative leadership as she deftly navigated NSNP through complex challenges and enormous organizational growth. As we conclude our search for her successor and begin a transition process in the first half of 2024, we look forward to sharing the next chapter of NSNP's leadership with you!

The Board of Directors has also undergone a leadership transition and has welcomed a new Executive Committee. I could not be more proud to serve as NSNP's incoming Board Chair, and our entire community is immensely grateful to our outgoing Board Co-Chairs, Meliza Reynoso, and Greg Wright, for their dedicated, loving, and hands-on leadership over the past three years!

Through moments of deep reflection on our past and future, we are grateful for our talented staff, who have continued to strengthen and expand our youth programs and worked with a wonderful garden team led by Iris Brown - Team Maravilla! - to remodel Las Parcelas, our largest community garden in Norris Square.

None of this would be possible without your continued support and investment in NSNP's work. We thank you and look forward to seeing you again throughout 2024!

With gratitude,



**Andrés Celin**  
Board Chair

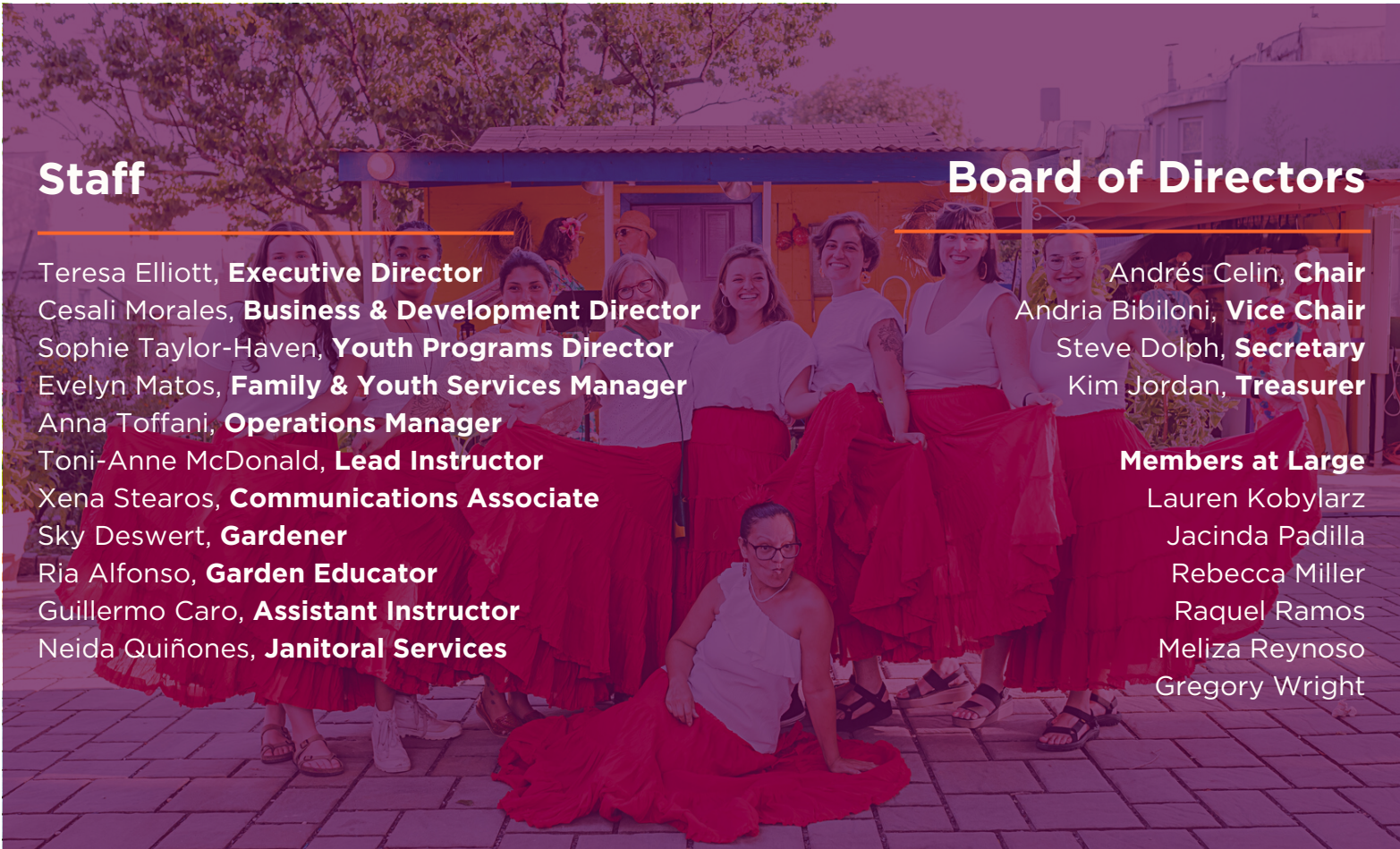


# Overview

Norris Square Neighborhood Project (NSNP) is a dynamic cultural hub that unites and inspires the local community through innovative youth-focused leadership programs, six distinct garden experiences, and various initiatives promoting art and self-expression. In 2023, NSNP proudly marked its 50th anniversary with a series of festivities, reaching its zenith with the Festival Jíbaro on July 22, 2023. This celebratory event not only honored the spirit of the community but also underscored NSNP's impact over five decades, witnessing increased program participation, partnerships, and connections to Norris Square's Puerto Rican culture and heritage.

Amidst this celebratory atmosphere, Teresa Elliott, NSNP's Executive Director (2019-2024), announced her forthcoming departure. Despite this change, NSNP's unwavering commitment to Youth Leadership Development, Stewardship of Community Land, and the Preservation of Culture and History remains steadfast.

Over the past year, NSNP has strengthened its youth programs, Semillas del Futuro and Raíces de Cambio, and ensured that the rich diversity of cultural heritage and environmental stewardship extends into the future for the benefit of young people and the broader community.



## Staff

- Teresa Elliott, **Executive Director**
- Cesali Morales, **Business & Development Director**
- Sophie Taylor-Haven, **Youth Programs Director**
- Evelyn Matos, **Family & Youth Services Manager**
- Anna Toffani, **Operations Manager**
- Toni-Anne McDonald, **Lead Instructor**
- Xena Stearos, **Communications Associate**
- Sky Deswert, **Gardener**
- Ria Alfonso, **Garden Educator**
- Guillermo Caro, **Assistant Instructor**
- Neida Quiñones, **Janitorial Services**

## Board of Directors

- Andrés Celin, **Chair**
- Andria Bibiloni, **Vice Chair**
- Steve Dolph, **Secretary**
- Kim Jordan, **Treasurer**

### Members at Large

- Lauren Kobylarz
- Jacinda Padilla
- Rebecca Miller
- Raquel Ramos
- Meliza Reynoso
- Gregory Wright



# Youth Programs

## Semillas del Futuro

A year-round leadership-building program for high school students. This program immerses youth in arts, entrepreneurship, gardening, and Puerto Rican culture while offering homework support, mentorship, and college prep. With a focus on work readiness and outdoor experiences in the summer, youth experience photography lessons, gardening, camping, and canoeing.

## Raíces de Cambio

A year-round apprenticeship teaching youth about gardening, farming, food justice, and the cultural impacts of urban green spaces. This program prepares students for entry-level positions in horticulture or agriculture while imparting knowledge about Puerto Rican history and indigenous Taíno gardening practices. Apprentices are paid hourly, and their produce is sold every Saturday during the growing season at the NSNP Farm Stand.

## Youth-Led Farm Stand

The Farm Stand sells fresh and affordable produce every Saturday from June to November at NSNP's Raíces garden.

# Garden Programs

## Network of Gardens

Through NSNP's network of gardens - El Batey, La Paz, Las Parcelas, Raíces, Villa Africana Colobó, and the Butterfly Garden - the organization grounds the community in Puerto Rican history and cultural heritage.

## Cultural & Service Immersions

NSNP provides a unique blend of community service, cultural immersion, and personal growth for school groups, corporate teams, and organizations.

## Campesinxs Program

This program offers raised beds to neighbors so they may grow produce and provides engaging garden workshops to foster community knowledge and participation.

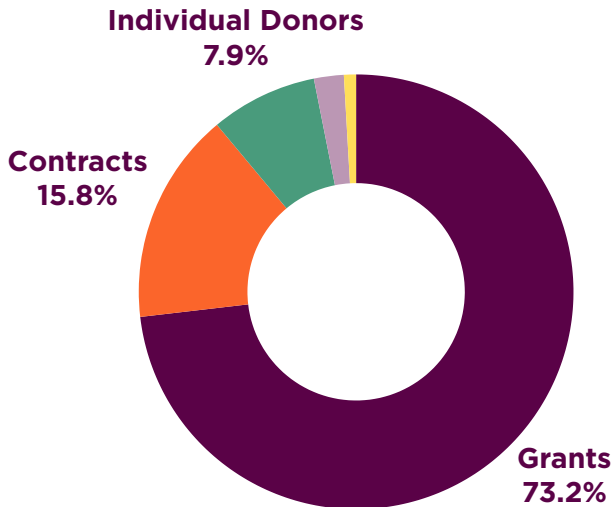
## Garden Tours

Schools and community groups can explore NSNP's gardens through tours that promote community resilience, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation. Topics include gentrification, community organizing, Caribbean diaspora foodways, and cultural food production.



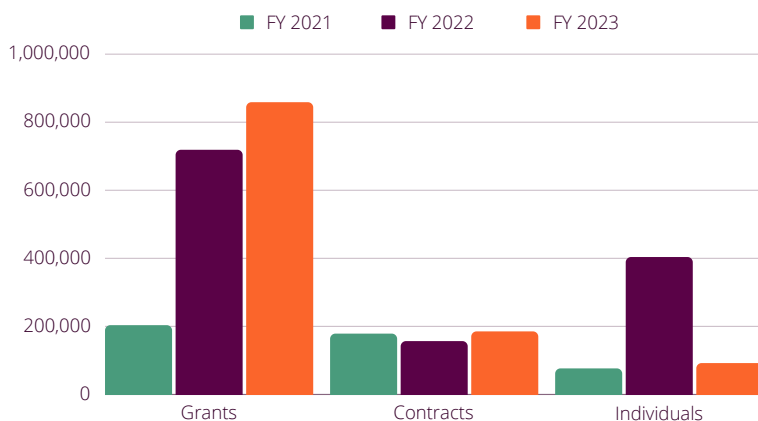
# NSNP by The Numbers

**Fiscal Year 2023**  
July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023



- Grants: \$858,843
- Individual Donors: \$93,216
- Contracts: \$185,319
- Other Income: \$26,051
- Corporate: \$10,575

**Revenue Total: \$1,174,000**



NSNP wholeheartedly embraced being a cultural hub and second home to its youth and community in 2023.

NSNP youth programs experienced record attendance, with **110 youth** participating at least twice weekly in our after-school and summer programs.

Our gardens were abundant, allowing our gardeners and youth to harvest **612 pounds** of produce. The Farm Stand, led by *Raíces de Cambio* apprentices, served **166 patrons**. Extra produce was distributed to neighbors and local organizations.

In addition to NSNP’s youth and garden programs, **1,675 visitors** experienced our green spaces. Many of these visitors volunteered their time and efforts to NSNP, resulting in **11,661 volunteer hours**.

- # Garden Visitors: 1,675
- # Pounds of Produce Harvested: 612
- # Farm Stand Visitors: 166
- # Students enrolled in youth program: 110
- # Volunteer hours (total # by events): 11,661

# Staff & Board Highlights

## Teresa Elliott's Leadership Recognition | Peg Dilk's Award

Teresa Elliott received the Peg Dilks Award from The Philadelphia Committee of The Garden Club of America. Teresa's leadership in amplifying community gardens and the cultural vision for Puerto Rican and Latine/x communities in ways such as progressing culturally relevant food production and intergenerational community building at NSNP is why she was chosen.

## Youth Team Growth & Leadership

NSNP's youth program team is expanding with new positions and deeper connections. A Youth Programs Director, a Youth and Family Services Manager, a Lead Instructor, a Garden Educator (part-time), and an Assistant Instructor (part-time) now make up the program team. Active participation in the Greater Philadelphia Extracurricular Collaborative (GPEC) leadership team and continued involvement in the Philadelphia Out of School Time Coalition (POST-C) exemplify the team's commitment to our youth.

## Gardening Team | Team Maravilla

Team Maravilla, led by Iris Brown, Garden Co-Founder, and team members Don Angel, Crystal, Marco, and Toñito, has made significant contributions to NSNP's gardens, creating beauty and completing numerous garden projects.

## NSNP Adds a Garden Educator

Ria Alfonso is NSNP's new Garden Educator. As such, they have enhanced hands-on learning, built cultural connections, and taught agriculture. This transformative role strengthens current programs and lays the foundation for long-term impact, contributing to youth leadership development and cultural preservation.

## Board Restructuring for Efficiency

The Board of Directors has restructured board positions and committees to increase efficiency and effectiveness.



GARDEN EDUCATOR, RIA,  
WITH STUDENTS.





# 2023 Initiatives

NSNP is presented with a proclamation from Representative Danilo Burgos at Festival Jíbaro.



## Digital Archive Building

NSNP has amassed a significant collection of materials documenting community efforts in youth leadership, land stewardship, and cultural preservation. To prevent these materials from potential loss or destruction, NSNP will create a comprehensive digital archive, which will be accessible to the public.

## Land Stewardship for Community Impact

NSNP is dedicated to land stewardship initiatives that strive to align efforts across sectors in Philadelphia affected by food, land, and environmental injustices. This is done through coalition building, e.g.. NSNP joined the Adjacent Construction Safety Coalition, Land Justice Convening Cohort, and hosted the Citywide Land Justice Convening with City Councilwoman (now Mayor) Cherelle Parker.

## Las Parcelas Enhancements

NSNP is transforming key elements of the Las Parcelas Garden. *El Fogón de Calalá* is reminiscent of a Puerto Rican outdoor kitchen and was created to cook food and share recipes. *Los Kioskos* replicate local businesses in Loíza, Puerto Rico, e.g., Casa Ayala, known for *vejigante* mask-making, a seamstress' home, and a little food store.

## Festival Jíbaro

Festival Jíbaro featured live music and dance performances, food, and crafts. It celebrated NSNP's history and provided an opportunity to learn and enjoy the community's cultural richness.



# Collaborations & Partnerships

**NSNP has benefited from numerous partnerships that have significantly contributed to making this year unlike any other, here are a few highlights:**

## **Penn State Extension Interns**

A special shout-out to Penn State Extension for their unwavering support and the exceptional contributions of their amazing summer interns, year after year.

## **Truelove Seeds and Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA)**

Our anticipation grows as we deepen our collaboration with Truelove Seeds, a farm-based seed company, and the PMA. Iris Brown's involvement in the collaborative Community Spotlight initiative is one part as we await future opportunities.

## **Wagner Free Institute of Science**

NSNP partnered with the Wagner Free Institute of Science to bridge science and art while fostering connections to self, peers, and the community. Together, the Wagner Free Institute of Science and NSNP provided garden tours and activities to elementary and middle school students.

## **Urban Ag Week - Philly Visit**

As part of the State's Urban Ag Week, members of Governor Shapiro's administration held a public hearing at Las Parcelas. NSNP staff, along with other individuals and organizations, provided testimony on the impact of the Pennsylvania Farm Bill in the Greater Philadelphia region.

## **Drexel University**

NSNP collaborated with Drexel University in an immersive community-based global learning (CBGL) program led by NSNP Board member Steve Vásquez Dolph. This partnership centers around building community while focusing on food and land security.

## **BUGs Farm Tour Feature**

NSNP was a featured stop on the Black Farmers and Urban Gardeners National Conference Farm Tour. The event introduced conference attendees to Philadelphia's growing spaces and shared information on origin stories, farming practices, and community impact. A conference highlight was sharing a meal prepared by NSNP's very own Iris Brown.



# Life After NSNP: Joselyn Wyatt

**We persist in our commitment to providing choices and possibilities for our students, as shown by 2023 NSNP graduate Joselyn Wyatt's story - a testament to NSNP's encouragement and influence.**

“Leaving Philadelphia and going across the country to California for school was something I would only dream about. When it became true, I felt so many emotions. I was happy to be somewhere new, especially in Los Angeles, California. There were many beautiful things to see. However, I was also scared. Traveling alone for the first time was nerve-wracking. The thought of me being alone more than 3,000 miles away from my family was daunting. I thought that I would not have anyone to rely on if something went wrong. After moving in to the University of Southern California (USC), I began to meet people and build relationships, although, in the beginning, I was closed off and alone. I was fortunate that my school provides a living-learning community, which is living around a group of people who are similar to you. I was on the Latina/x floor, and one of my fears was that I wouldn't fit in or find people like me at USC. The first week was called welcome week, which revolved around meeting new people and attending fun events such as a silent disco, a live concert, etc.



After months of being in California and completing my first semester, I can say that everything was worth it. I love California. Some days are harder than others, especially missing home, but you'll get through it. I live by a motto: don't back away from something that scares you because, at the end of the day, you'll power through. What helped a lot with my adjustment was the experience I learned at NSNP, such as building relationships and being independent. Moving through this whole process was easier with the NSNP staff by my side, whether it was helping with the application and moving in process or being supportive of my decision and giving advice. I couldn't have done it without them,” said Wyatt.

## A Celebration of Life

We mourn the loss of **Eileen Gallagher**, who dedicated 33 years to the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, most recently as Associate Director of Community Gardens. Eileen also had a long history with NSNP, supporting community partnerships to grow sustainable food and cultural programs.



# Challenges & Lessons Learned

## Land Insecurity & Pressures

Land insecurity is a significant concern for land stewards in Philadelphia. Competing interests and recent changes in Philadelphia Land Bank policies have resulted in the loss of crucial green spaces for fellow land stewards. Impacted communities lack influence over land disposition decisions, highlighting the need for increased community-based advocacy to achieve equitable outcomes. NSNP is among many land stewards affected by current policies.

## Impact of Gun Violence

Neighborhood safety remains a top priority for NSNP, our students, and our families. Staff faced the realities of gun violence during a summer drive-by shooting just feet from our building. While no one was injured, the incident's proximity to NSNP during

program hours (students were on-site) had a lasting impact.

## Youth Mental Health Support

Recognizing the expressed needs and interests of youth, NSNP is committed to addressing the well-being of the youth within our community by providing more mental health support opportunities.

## Funders

Allen Hilles Fund  
Anonymous  
Christian R. & Mary F. Lindback Foundation  
The Christopher Ludwick Foundation  
City of Philadelphia Office of Children & Families  
Forman Family Fund  
Independence Foundation  
Independence Public Media Foundation  
Lawrence Saunders Fund  
Leeway Foundation  
Leo & Peggy Pierce Family Foundation  
Joseph Robert Foundation

The McLean Contributionship  
Partners for Campus Community Engagement  
PECO  
The Philadelphia Committee of the Garden Club of America  
Philadelphia Cultural Fund  
Philadelphia Foundation  
Philadelphia Youth Network  
Planet Aid  
PNC Charitable Trust  
Rosenlund Family Foundation  
Sheila Fortune Foundation  
Tree Brother Fund  
White Richardson Fund

## Multi-Year Funders

Claneil Foundation  
City of Philadelphia Office of Children & Families  
Connelly Foundation  
Forman Arts Initiative  
Merck Family Fund

The Nelson Foundation  
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture  
Rite Aid Healthy Futures  
William Penn Foundation



# Future Plans

**NSNP invites community members, supporters, and partners to actively engage in and support these future initiatives. Whether through volunteering, providing input, or contributing resources, your involvement is crucial in shaping a future that reflects the values and aspirations of NSNP and its community. Together, we can build a more vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich environment for everyone.**

## Youth Agricultural Trip to Puerto Rico

NSNP is preparing a transformative trip to Puerto Rico with its youth in 2024, fostering cultural connections and providing an immersive agricultural experience contributing to their personal and community growth.

## La Casita de Abuela Redesign

A redesign of La Casita de Abuela in Las Parcelas garden is on the horizon. NSNP is excited to create a space that better serves as a “living museum” for the neighborhood and showcases objects that evoke life in Puerto Rico. This is an important space that aligns with our cultural values.

## New Website and Logo

NSNP is updating its logo and website to streamline communications, make information more accessible, and engage the community.

## Raíces Updates

NSNP plans to update the Raíces garden, optimizing the space for the farm stand, cultural activities, and community engagement. This project will align with NSNP’s mission and the community’s evolving needs.

## Mural Honoring Grupo Motivos

In collaboration with Mural Arts Philadelphia, artist Celso Gonzalez, and NSNP, a mural project is in the pipeline to honor Grupo Motivos. The mural will recognize Grupo Motivos’ impact on the community and celebrate the cultural richness at NSNP.

